Castlemaine Naturalist

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Monthly newsletter of the Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.

Ghost fungus, Sailor's Gully - photo Noel Young

The new DELWP approach to planned burns

Peter Turner

At the June General Meeting, Paul Bates (District Manager, Murray Goldfields District, DELWP) and Ben Matthews (Regional Fire Planner – Loddon Mallee Region, DELWP) spoke about the changes in the way DELWP plans for and carries out its fire risk reduction work. The new government *Safer Together* policy aims to reduce the risk of damaging bushfires by focusing on areas of highest risk as assessed through fire modelling and local knowledge and experience. In our region, it is expected that this approach will reduce the number and extent of planned burns by up to 50% compared to the former policy of burning 5% of the state each year.

Paul noted that prior to 2009, 2000 – 4000 hectares were burnt each year in our region, whereas after the Royal Commission findings, up to 14,000 ha were blackened. The new *Safer Together* practices make use of the PHOENIX Rapidfire fire modelling software, developed by the University of Melbourne and the Bushfire CRC with DELWP, to predict fire intensity for given fuel hazard levels under worst-case bushfire weather, which has been successful in modelling the actual behaviour of a number of bushfires. Ben described how the reduction in risk for a selected area can be estimated for a given reduction (through planned burns, slashing undergrowth or mulching) in fuel hazards. An example of an effective planned burn was shown for the forest south of Chewton, where a fire started by lightning was contained to a few hectares compared to the major damage that the PHOENIX software predicted if the planned burn had not occurred 2 years earlier.

The new policies and practices involve year-round consultation with communities, and cooperation with the Dja Dja Warrung people who are working to revive Aboriginal mosaic burning practices. While the primary objective is to minimize risks to human life, minimizing the impacts of major bushfires on communities, infrastructure, industries and the environment are key goals – including maintaining the resilience of natural ecosystems. In our region, while the risk has been reduced significantly since 2000, further reductions are needed.

This note can only touch on parts of the information presented by Paul and Ben. There was a lively and extended discussion in response to members' questions and comments. Further details are available in the DELWP publication *Strategic Bushfire Management Plan – West Central.* Preliminary results of collaborative research by Latrobe and Deakin universities with DELWP and PV into the impacts on birds, animals and plants are presented in *Planned burning in box-ironbark forests;* copies of these were made available to members. My overall impression is that the new policies are a pleasing improvement on recent past practices, and that our guest speakers are committed to better management of fire risks, including to environmentally sensitive areas. But it is early days, and there are many potential concerns – for example, see the FOBIF comments over recent months, on their website: *www.fobif.org*

Dreadful Difficulties with Customs

Tony Morton

I don't know if you've ever tried to send a collection of butterflies overseas? Well, my advice to you is: don't!

I'd been collecting these insects since I was 8 (except for a decade or two when I wasted the summers playing cricket). By 2012 I had amassed a collection of some 8,000 specimens from every continent except South America. The mounted butterflies were contained in 50 store-boxes and two 20 drawer cabinets. There were also a thousand or so specimens in paper envelopes in tin boxes. Some dated back to 1943, caught by me in our garden in Delhi.

I'd been losing interest in the collection for a few years. I hardly ever looked at them; no one else seemed interested; my eyes weren't what they were ('No, they used to be my ears.' said Eccles!), and I was no longer driven to be out in the bush - to look for new sites for the 'Eltham', or 'Castlemaine' Copper, for instance.

I had seen plenty of splendid collections of insects reduced to dust by not being looked after properly, so I decided to donate my collection to a museum. This was not easy! The National Museum in Canberra (ANIC) complimented me on the photos I sent it but said it had no more room, having just received two large collections of Australian butterflies and expecting three others when their owners dropped off the hooks. The State Museums would accept the butterflies of their own state - if I took them there - but were not interested in anything else. I did not want to split the collection up.

I contacted the Hope Collection in Oxford, the British Museum of Natural History, the Zoological Museum in Munich, the McGuire Institute of Biodiversity in Florida. The first three expressed polite interest while the McGuire Institute said it would send out a curator to pack up my collection and arrange to fly it out to Atlanta to join the other eight million specimens in its vast collections. So, of course, I said 'Yes, please!'

It was now September 2013. On his way to Borneo to study a family of moths there, a nice young man spent a couple of days with us packing everything up into eleven big cardboard boxes. 'Easy compared to my last job – 140,000 beetles from Vienna.' he remarked.

In the meantime I had been struggling with permits (essential as the collection was

going overseas). If you're still with me, I should explain that two sorts of permit were needed. One was for the 150 or so CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) specimens I had ('dealers' can sell these for up to $1,000 each for the rare ones!), and the other to export Australian native insects. So I had been counting up the specimens I had of the various taxa, filling in the forms and paying the fees.

Eventually the precious permits arrived, a van came from the shippers and permits and boxes were carted off. I was very pleased and thankful.

It was now well into 2014. We were looking forward to a visit to Florida to see the collection *in situ* in the fullness of time. Instead I received an e-mail from the Institute saying that, as Australian Customs had failed to initial the permits in the space that allowed the exportation of the consignment, the butterflies were illegal and would have to be returned to Australia!

Heroic efforts on the part of the Director of the Institute resulted in a compromise after a few months: the Australian specimens would be admitted with the rest of the collection, but the CITES specimens would have to be returned. A very irritated (I imagine) curator had to drive the five hours from Gainesville to Atlanta, unpack the eleven boxes, take out the CITES insects, repack the boxes and drive back. Demurrage (I've never used this word before!) was in the region of $10,000, which the Institute had to pay, I was told. So the vast majority of the collection was finally delivered to the Institute. It is now 2015!

So what happened to the 150 Rajah Brooke's Birdwings, and the Kaiser-i-Hinds, the *Troides* and the Apollos, I hear you ask? Well, they arrived back in Tullamarine and were immediately 'seized' by Australian Customs, the very people who had caused the whole problem, as 'illegal imports', there being no export licence from the US for them! Some months passed as I tried to obtain their 'release' through e-mailing WTA (Wildlife Trade Assessments) in Canberra, from whom I had obtained the permits.

During all this time the insects were without any protection (like naphthalene) and so were at the mercy of 'museum beetles' and booklice. Eventually I received the formal letter allowing me to collect them from Tullamarine Customs House and bring them back home. Many were much damaged through neglect and being shifted about during their travels. Those I was not able to glue together again are now in a bag awaiting artistic inspiration by the Frau. The few left that were in good condition I took down to the Melbourne Museum a few weeks ago which was pleased to have them as they're very pretty!

I don't know if this tale has a moral except to warn one not to tangle with bureaucracy if one can possibly avoid it!

Thank you to the contributors to this month's Castlemaine Naturalist.

The June issue was successfully emailed to those who requested that format. I believe this amounts to roughly one quarter of the total. We will continue to have a print run for those who prefer a hard copy.

Please note that the deadline for articles for the August issue is July 29.

- ED

Mystery Flower (June newsletter)

Geraldine Harris

***Cassinia aculeata* (Common Cassinia)**

Cassinia – after the French botanist Count Alexander Henri Gabriel de Cassini, (1781-18320, aculeatus = spine-like, prickly (refers to rough projections on the leaves)

A member of the Daisy family (Asteraceae), this Common Cassinia was photographed in a small isolated patch growing in a steep valley our bush at Barkers Creek. Despite its name it is uncommon in the Castlemaine area and more abundant in southern forests where moist well-drained soils are more common.

It grows as a medium shrub (2-4m x 1-2m) with domed sprays of small white cottony flowers. The dull green leaves are long and narrow with a prominent single vein, and revolute margins.

Other Cassinia you may find in the area are *Cassinia arcuata* (Coffee Bush/ Drooping Cassinia), *Cassinia diminuta* (Sticky Cassinia), and *Cassinia longifolia* (Shiny Cassinia).

Ref: Australian Plants Society Maroondah (2001) *Flora of Melbourne*, Hyland House, Melbourne
Mayfield, E. 2013, *Flora of the Otway Plain & Ranges 2,* CSIRO Publishing
Perkins, E., Is it a weed CD.

Orchid Leaf Search Project

As many of you will know our plant esteemed club elder Ern Perkins is working on a new plant CD – last count 970 illustrated plants – and he plans to make this wonderful resource available as soon as the long and tedious process of editing is completed. Ern intends to provide copies of this new Plant CD on memory stick for members to borrow and he has expressed the hope that the new list can be kept up to date, with new plants added to it, and better photos, as they are available. Ern wrote "The Castlemaine Plant list was made very much better because of the contributions by club members and others. I hope that this tradition continues".

Ern added, "I would also like to add a section "Orchid Leaves". Some orchid people can recognise any orchid just from the leaves. It would be a great club project to search for orchid leaves, photograph them, and if necessary go back later to see what they turn into. It would be great resource. And this year looks like being a good year for orchid leaves."

So come along and join us on our July 9 Field Trip when we will start our official search for orchid leaves and hopefully we will be able to revisit these plants to photograph the flowers at a later date. No time to waste, so get out there with you cameras and see what leaves you can record.

Hold on to your best photos and we will let you know what to do with them on the day.

Geraldine Harris
gedharris@castlemaine.net

Photo 1

In the meantime – here are four 'leaf' photos supplied by Geraldine. See if you can figure them out – answers next month.

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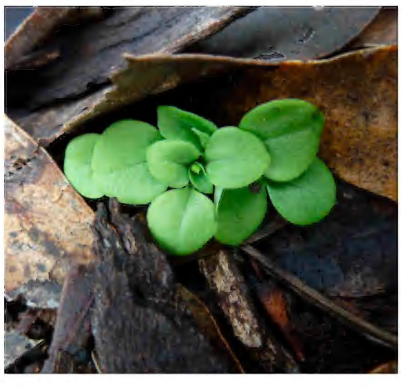

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June mystery bird

Last month the mystery bird was the **Buff-banded Rail**. Though listed as rare on our local bird list, observations seem to turn up now and then, and its general distribution includes the whole state. Perhaps it would be reported more often if it were not a shy and secretive bird, favouring aquatic environments, and yet it can act quite tame at times, and may wander into gardens.

Mystery bird for this month

The bird depicted here (left) is our subject for this month. This one should be easy as it is common in the dry bush around Castlemaine.

Specimens from Readers of "Wildlife" (July 1945)

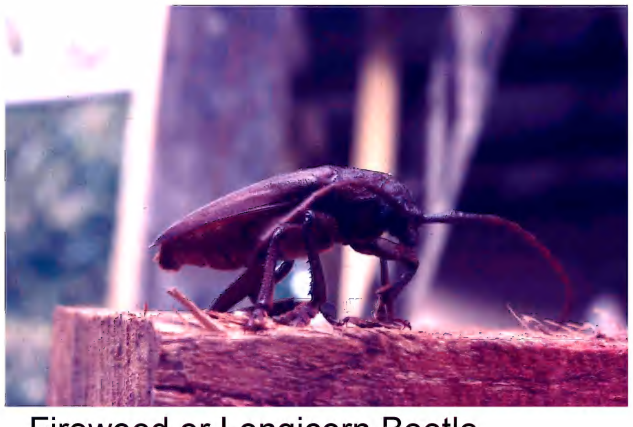
George Broadway

"Wildlife" was a nature magazine which ran from the early forties till the early fifties. The Editor was Crosbie Morrison who also had a radio show, on which he would answer listener's queries. Continuing with noting the specimens sent in to Crosbie Morrison in July 70 years ago. Were people more observant in those days? These are his answers to some of the queries.

INSECTS

1. Ant Lions Again. A reader reported that he had four Ant Lion larvae in a tobacco tin, but three months later only one was present. It was pointed out that in nature one larva may have to go without food for a considerable time, although three months in a tobacco tin would have been rather a long time with only three unfortunate companions for company (food)

Ant Lion



Firewood or Longicorn Beetle

2. Firewood Beetle, Phoracantha tricuspis. A common inhabitant of firewood in which the large grub-like larvae make large tunnels.

3. Gum Sawfly. The Larvae which are usually found in clusters on Eucalypts are known as Spitfires due to their habit of exuding a foul liquid when disturbed.

4. Rhinoceros Beetle, from Cowley's Creek near Camperdown. So-called because of the horn-like projection on its head. Feeds on dung and other debris and breeds underground.

5. Mealy-bug. Similar to some which make those large galls on Eucalypts. They suck the sap from trees and may be troublesome in the garden.

6. Carpet Beetle. The small grubs were the larvae, voracious feeders on fibres of animal origin.

7. Carpet beetle

8. Red Gum Ghost Moth, usually seen on cold drizzly nights. The larva is an underground grub which bores into the roots of trees.

SPIDERS

1. A spider with body the shape and size of a pigeons egg. A Golden-web Nephila . Web strong made of silk with a golden sheen.

2. Melbourne Trapdoor Spider. . Aname butleri. (Now apparently named Stanwellia butleri) Not regarded as dangerous. Second specimen Pholcus, "Daddy Longlegs" Common in most Victorian homes making "lace curtains" on walls and ceilings.

3. Nephila
4.5,6. Orchard or "Bird-dropping Spider" Harmless. Shams dead when touched.

Bird-dropping Spider

Melbourne Trapdoor Spider

MAMMALS

1. Whistling Mice . Singing Mice (Has anyone heard of these ?)
They are well known and their voice has been compared in quality with that of a canary. It is due to a hereditary deformity of the air passages and occurs in families.

Observations

Helen and Kit had a photo of a male Red-headed Mouse Spider taken on a recent walk.

George had a specimen of a Ghost Fungus which was one of several he had found – some tested as luminous, others not.

Peter Turner reported seeing a **Grey Butcherbird** at home in north Castlemaine, and on a visit to Crusoe reservoir, an unusual gathering of about 20 Eastern Rosella.

22/6/16 Mid morning: Whale sighted about 250 m off-shore at Hutt Gully, Anglesea; Unknown species, about 4m long, heading slowly west. - Geoff and Jarrod Harris.

20/6/16 Sea Eagle cruising around Crusoe Reservoir, Bendigo. According to the ranger it has an uncanny knack of turning up on the occasions when they re-stock the lake with trout – Noel Young

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

Castlemaine Field Naturalists
Coming events

Fri July 8 meeting: DAMIAN KELLY – Hugh Leach and the history of birding in Australia

Sat July 9 field trip: GERALDINE HARRIS - Orchid leaf recognition

Aug 6/7 Swift Parrot Survey – 9am start

Fri Aug 12 meeting: ALAN REID – Regional Model for monitoring Flora & Fauna (using Flinders as an example)

Sat Aug 13 field trip: TBA

Aug 20 Roadside Cleanup - 9am start

VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

General meetings - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

Field Trips - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

Business meetings - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

Club website (Web master: Chris Timewell) - http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/

Subscriptions for 2016
Ordinary membership: Single $30, Family $40
Pensioner or student: Single $25, Family $30
Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

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